COMMITTEE TO PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF VIETNAMESE CHILDREN

VIETNAM BABYLIFT

PRESS RELEASE

FEDERAL OFFICIALS SUED TO RETURN BABYLIFT CHILDREN

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SAN FRANCISCO, APRIL ~~29~~ 30 --

The recently formed Committee to Protect the Rights of Vietnamese Children announced today the filing of a lawsuit in the United States District Court, San Francisco, to require high ranking U.S. Government officials to permit investigation of the circumstances surrounding the removal of children from Vietnam during the current "Babylift" and to return to Vietnam, when safe to do so, any children who are not orphans and who have been illegally separated from their families. Those named as defendants include Secretary of State Kissinger, Attorney General Levi and Secretary of Defense Schlesinger.

The Committee, comprised of social workers, theologians, lawyers and Vietnam academicians, was represented at a press briefing in the Federal Building this morning by attorney Nancy Stearns, an associate of the New York City based Center for Constitutional Rights. Stearns stressed that all that is being requested is compliance with the law so as to assure that no children have been erroneously separated from their parents and family. "If this has occurred," she said, "the correct moral and legal thing to do is to return the children to their homes when it is safe to do so." "After World War ii," she said, "no adoption of displaced children was

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The lawsuit requests disclosure of the whereabouts of the children and permission to interview them to obtain further information, as well as to make available all records involving the Babylift to determine whether there are other children who are not orphans. The Government would also be required to compile complete records, including photographs, of children still in its custody and to place these children with an appropriate private non-adoptive agency pending investigation of each case. The Committee recommended that the children be kept together in groups under the care of Vietnamese to reduce the possible cultural shock and ease the children's return to Vietnam, if necessary. The Committee said that Joseph H. Reid, deputy president of the International Union for Child Welfare, which supervised the return of Biafran children to their homes, has promised his organization's full cooperation in caring for the children and returning them to their homes.

Members of the Committee to Protect the Rights of Vietnamese Children include theologians Robert McAffee Brown and Mark Juergensmeyer; Vietnam sociologist Don Luce, executive director of Clergy and Laity Concerned; Douglas Hostetter, asian consultant at the United Methodist Office for the United Nations; Dr. David G. Marr, co-director of the Indochina Resource Center, a public interest research group; Jane and David Barton of the American Friends Service Committee; Vietnamese anthropologist, Tran Tuong Nhu and Tom Miller of International Children's Fund; poet Grace Paley and peace activists Cora Weiss and Madeleine Duckles. Contributions to support the lawsuit are being solicited, and may be mailed to: "Baby Return", Center for Constitutional Rights, 853 Broadway, New York City 10003.